

CCC INTERVIEW WITH VERNON SHELTON

Date: May 20.

Location:

Interviewer: Larry Bird

DNR: Where was your home town?

Vernon: Hutchinson, Kansas.

DNR: How old were you?

Vernon: 18.

DNR: What did you do before you went to the CCC's?

Vernon: Messenger job for Western Telegraph Co. I couldn't find a decent job.

DNR: Why did you join the CCC's?

Vernon: I was staying with a great aunt and uncle. I had no job. I had no money. That's my excuse.

DNR: What CCC camps were you assigned too?

Vernon: 4769 in Washington State. Wyoming and Idaho.

DNR: You were transferred?

Vernon: Yes, the company was transferred. I joined in Kansas. They shipped me from Kansas to Washington State. I enjoyed the train trip out, it was beautiful. I didn't care where I went.

DNR: When did you join up?

Vernon: April of '38.

DNR: You went to Ft. Leavenworth to be inducted?

Vernon: I was there a week.

DNR: What was the first day in camp like?

Vernon: I got uniforms in Leavenworth.

DNR: Did you take any personal items with you when you went?

Vernon: No.

DNR: Were there any items you couldn't bring with you?

Vernon: No.

DNR: In Washington, how were you housed?

Vernon: Wooden barracks.

DNR: How did they decide you were going to go?

Vernon: I had no idea.

DNR: How about bedding and sleepwear?

Vernon: All government issue.

DNR: Do you remember who were your bunkmates were?

Vernon: Yes. A kid from my home town, who I went to school with in Hutchinson, Kansas. Clark Keller was his name. There was a couple of other guys. Speck Brothers.

DNR: How did you guys get along?

Vernon: Great. Hardly any fights.

DNR: So \$25 went home and you kept \$5?

Vernon: I got to put \$25 in a savings account every month. When I left I got a check for \$300. I got paid on the first of the month. In Wyoming I got paid in silver dollars sometimes.

DNR: How was the food?

Vernon: It was the best I had in years.

DNR: Who did the cooking?

Vernon: CCC boys.

DNR: How were the holiday meals?

Vernon: Good. Extra feed. The only time it was bad is in the Teuton Mountains making bone trails. The lunches were terrible. Everyday fried egg sandwiches.

DNR: How did you spend the money you earned?

Vernon: Pop and candy bars. No beer. Not until 1940 when I was in the service. But I drank other stuff. We hiked 20 miles and got a ride to the town and had some apricot brandy in Driggs, Idaho. I thought I died the next day. It was very cold. Miserable winters.

DNR: Did have recreational activities?

Vernon: We had a library. I finished up as the librarian.

DNR: Was the Sabbath observed?

Vernon: Yes we had a service in the morning and a nice meal.

DNR: Any sport activities in the camp?

Vernon: We had skiing and tobogganing. I enjoyed tobogganing.

DNR: How long were you in the camp?

Vernon: I was two months in Washington. I worked on a log cabin. I learned how to make windows. I was night guard, until someone stole some bowls and they shipped

me to the mountains on foot, 15 mile walk. It was beautiful. Hard work, but I enjoyed it. Horseback and packing trails.

DNR: Did you have any personal conflicts in camp?

Vernon: Everybody got along real well. We had a guy who was a sissy. His name was Norman Carlson. When I was librarian, I saw an ad for a free Kotex. He didn't know it was me, but he was upset about it. There was very little problems.

DNR: If there were any disagreements or fights what would happen?

Vernon: One guy got knocked out with a thrown boot. It started up again and we wrecked the door. The CO made us pay twenty cents a piece for the door. Here's a piece right here. Twenty cents was a lot of money. I kept it all these years. That started out in fun and it got a little serious. There were food fights too.

DNR: What kind of discipline for rule breakers?

Vernon: KP.

DNR: Were there any vocational or educational training?

Vernon: I took courses in aeronautics. I was interested in flying. Took extension classes out of California.

DNR: Do you remember any of your instructors?

Vernon: Yes. We had an educational advisor named Mr. McCoury from Canada. He was an out of work teacher.

DNR: Where were the classes held?

Vernon: In the library in the camp.

DNR: What were the main projects you worked on?

Vernon: In Washington, pick and shovel work on the trails. In the Teutons, I peeled logs, worked as a night guard and worked on a cabin. Real early in the morning I went up to the lake to work on a gas engine for the water supply. I ran into a Bull Moose and hit him in the face. It scared the daylights out of me. The rest of the time I worked on a spike camp in Wyoming. In Idaho I worked as a painter. That was under the Department of Grazing. (inaudible) We killed rabbits, jack rabbits because there was too many. When it got 35 degrees below zero you didn't have to work outside. Then I worked as a file clerk the last few months in Idaho.

DNR: Did you pick up any skills?

Vernon: I learned how to paint. I know how to paint signs.

DNR: Do you remember any of your foreman?

Vernon: The foreman on the trail was John. He was the oldest son of Brigham Young. He was the foreman of the picks and shovels. The other man was called shorty. He was 6' 6". He was the powder man. He showed us how to set fuses and blow dynamite.

DNR: How did you get along with these guys?

Vernon: Terrific. Terrific guys.

DNR: Did you use any specialized equipment?

Vernon: We did a lot of blasting with dynamite.

DNR: Did everyone get along on the crew?

Vernon: Oh yeah. There were only two foreman.

DNR: Have you stayed in contact with anyone?

Vernon: No.

DNR: Did the city kids and the country kids get along?

Vernon: These were all city kids.

DNR: Were there any minorities in the camp?

Vernon: No. But they had camps that were segregated.

DNR: Did you learn any special skills while you were in the school?

Vernon: I did learn painting, some carpentry work. It made it easier for me in the army.

DNR: Were there any injuries?

Vernon: Tobogganing. Camp doctor was killed in Wyoming. The guy was an alcoholic. He got killed by a truck driver.

DNR: Were there diseases in the camp?

Vernon: No.

DNR: Were there any rodent or insect problems?

Vernon: No.

DNR: Did you doing any work for the outside community?

Vernon: No.

DNR: Did you have any contact with the outside community?

Vernon: No. I think once or twice the high school put on a program for us. There was a rodeo. One of our guys took top prize with bronco riding. The locals didn't like that.

DNR: Were there any Masonic organizations?

Vernon: No.

DNR: Were there any contact with females?

Vernon: At my first stop in Washington, the guys on the truck were talking about 'boxcar Annie.' She would take you into the boxcar for five or ten cents. I was so innocent, I didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't ask them, I just kept my mouth shut. I never went to boxcar Annie.

DNR: Were there any problems with the local men in the community?

Vernon: When we were in Idaho, we saw a show for a quarter.

DNR: Did the community like the camp?

Vernon: Well, we were there to help them.

DNR: Did you have any memorable experiences?

Vernon: Clark Keller and I went to a pool house to play pool. It cost a nickel. There was a cougar on the wall, and we took it back to the camp. We put it at the head of this guy's bed and shined the light on him, and he jumped. The next day we took the cougar head back to the bar and remounted it. Nobody noticed it had been gone. We had that whole thing for a week.

DNR: Did you have any strange or odd experiences at the camp?

Vernon: Well, we had another funny thing in Idaho, on a paint crew, we had already painted the barracks, silver gray, we were painting the outhouse, and someone would light up a newspaper and when (inaudible). He dropped the paper down the toilet.

DNR: What was your biggest accomplishment in the CCC?

Vernon: Well, I think a little self-confidence. I was a bashful boy. I took my \$300 and bought a '32 roadster and then in July of '39 I enlisted in the army. Horse Cavalry. I gave a few dollars to my aunt and uncle. I should of given them more. I got out in March. I was in the infantry for 3 ½ years. I came out and finished my high school. I applied at the post office and worked there 32 years. I retired in February of '79. I work for Younkers part time. I worked out in Younkers in Merle Hay for 7 years selling clothes. I think the CCC's was the best thing that ever happened to me. Most of the time I had three meals a day except for that egg sandwich.

END OF TRANSCRIPT – SAM J. HAIM - SCRIBE